



**NORTH EAST REGIONAL EMPLOYERS'  
ORGANISATION  
and  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION**



**THE NORTH EAST CHARTER  
for  
*ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT***

**CHARTER PLUS ASSESSMENT  
REPORT**

Authority Name:  
**Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council**

Date of Visit:  
**30 January 2019**

**THE NORTH EAST CHARTER  
FOR MEMBER DEVELOPMENT**

**VERIFICATION VISIT**

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## **Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council**

### **North East Charter Plus**

#### **Onsite Visit**

Assessment visits to authorities are undertaken by an Elected Member and an Officer. On this occasion Councillor Malcolm Brain, Gateshead MBC Councillor and LGA Member Peer, and Jill Rouse, Associate, North East Regional Employers' Organisation, conducted the onsite visit.

The purpose of the visit was to verify the information submitted by the Authority in their portfolio presented for assessment for the Charter Plus for Member Development, which is the extended standard following Member Charter.

Interviews were conducted with Elected Members and Officers from the local authority. Whilst the content of the individual interviews is confidential the information gathered has been used to support the submission made by the local authority.

For the purposes of gaining Charter Plus, information, "storyboards" or "case studies" were also requested. This was because we needed to ascertain whether Member learning and development is having an impact on Members' effectiveness, both within the council, and in their community leadership role in their wards.

**Interviews:**

10.00 am - 10.30 am	<b>Andrew Frosdick</b> , Exec Director, CORE Services
10.45 am - 11.15 am	<b>Cllr Sir Steve Houghton</b> , Leader
11.30am – 12.15 pm	<b>Member Development Officers</b> (Michael Potter, Amanda Glew, Kay Welbourne and Lesley Glanville)
12.15 pm – 12.45pm	<b>Cllr Platts and Cllr Bruff</b> , Cabinet Members
13.00pm – 14.00pm	<b>Review of intranet evidence</b>
14.00 pm – 14.45 pm	<b>Area Councils Chairs and Officers</b> (Cllr Mick Stowe, Cllr Richard Riggs, Cllr Joe Hayward, Cllr Robert Barnard, Cllr Dave Leech, Phil Hollingsworth and Kate Faulkes)
14.15 pm – 15.00 pm	<b>Dianna Terris</b> , Chief Executive (via telephone)
15.00 pm – 16.00 pm	<b>Chair &amp; Members of the Member Development Working Party</b> (Cllr Sharon Howard (Chair), Cllr Robert Barnard, Cllr Phil Lofts, Cllr Ken Richardson, Cllr Richard Riggs, Cllr Hannah Kitching, Cllr Sarah Tattersall and Cllr Kevin Williams)
16.15 pm – 16.30 pm	<b>Cllr Nicola Sumner</b> , New Member
17.00 pm	Close

The verifiers would like to thank all those above who gave their time so generously.

**Special thanks to Lesley Glanville**, Organisation and Workforce Improvement Strategy Officer, for arranging meetings and for putting together the authority's portfolio of evidence.

## **Evidence Presented to Support Submission**

The evidence examined has been drawn from three main sources. Firstly, from the portfolio provided by the Council, and secondly from a review of Intranet information for Councillors, and then through the information gathered at the interviews. The evidence has been organised against the three sets of good practice guidelines of the Charter Plus, and Members and officers were asked a variety of questions depending upon their role.

### **1. THERE IS A CLEAR COMMITMENT TO COUNCILLOR DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT**

#### **Evidence from Portfolio and Intranet**

The CEO and Leader have shown commitment to Member development by signing up for Charter and now Charter Plus and through supporting the Member Development Working Party (MDWP).

There is a Member Development Policy which has been in place since 2005 and was reviewed in 2018. The policy is supported by a Members' Intranet-based Handbook and Role Descriptions.

The Member Development Strategy and Organisational Improvement Strategy are closely linked to the overall Future Council Strategy and all corporate planning processes. All are reviewed annually.

The MDWP was formed in 2005 and is very well-established and well thought of. This is an all-party group with an advisory function – making recommendations to Cabinet about Members' Learning and Development (L&D). The group has a ring-fenced Member learning and development budget to meet priority needs. Evidence of this budget and spending review were provided.

Barnsley has a dedicated Member Development Officer who is now part of the Organisation and Workforce Improvement Team. The whole team offers support to Members. Members are totally aware of who they are and what they do.

As well as demonstrating commitment to the development of Barnsley MBC Members, the authority also evidences commitment to sharing learning opportunities more widely, for example, with Ward Alliance Members and Scrutiny Co-optees. A Ward Alliance Event was held in 2017 and some of the Barnsley MBC "Talkabouts" have included Ward Alliance Members. Town and Parish Councillors have also been invited to a number of events.

They also encourage citizen participation and promote local democracy through an annual Town Hall Open day where Members and Officers talk to the public and potential Councillors. There is a Barnsley Youth Council and the authority's Internet site has information about all of the above.

### **Evidence from Interviews and Storyboards**

The Executive Director described how the Senior Management Team demonstrates its commitment and supports Member Learning and Development (L&D) in a very practical way, by being available to support Members, not just at Induction and on internally run L&D Programmes, but by making themselves available to Members to answer questions and brief on a one-to-one basis, if necessary, and at "Talkabouts".

Senior Management Team discusses Member Development quite frequently and see it as part of the Leadership offer. There is a new Leadership Programme for officers, which has been adapted for Members and is about to be rolled out. 42 out of 63 Members have signed up to at least part of this programme.

The CEO said that all big decision-making and strategy events include Members. There is a clearly established culture of joint working between Members and Officers.

The Leader talked about the impact the instigation of Area Councils has had on Members. It has changed how Members work in their communities and people have had to learn a raft of new skills to be effective in their new roles, for example, commissioning and procurement skills. Both Political and Managerial leaders have played an active role in identifying and developing the necessary skills. He felt that the Area Councils were, on the whole, working very well because L&D and support had been done effectively.

The Members interviewed described how they have access to development opportunities in a variety of ways. They can attend sessions or read materials on the Intranet site. There are also some video tutorials. They can always ask for a briefing from a senior officer too. There are no sessions run in the evenings now. However, only one Member mentioned this as a potential problem as someone who works during the day. However, she felt the other learning methods mostly met her needs.

## **2. THE COUNCIL HAS A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO COUNCILLOR DEVELOPMENT**

### **Evidence from Portfolio and Intranet**

The Member Development Working Party (MDWP) advises on Member development strategy and is tasked with evaluating learning and development as well as planning to meet identified need. The strategy identifies clearly how learning and development needs are to be met. It also links directly to Corporate Priorities and was included in the “Future Council Strategy”. There is a strong Officer input to this too.

Member Role Descriptors are well-established and are used to identify development needs both where Members are new to the Council and when they change roles. The descriptors can be found in the Members’ section of the Council’s Intranet.

All Members are offered the opportunity to complete a Personal Development Review (PDR) every year. Their first is offered as part of the Induction process. Most Members have a current PDR. PDRs are used to determine the learning needs of individuals and opportunities for group learning.

Regular Policy Updates are provided, which update Members on legislation and key policies and Barnsley has a series of “Talkabouts” to discuss key topics. Copies of the presentations are uploaded to the Intranet for those Members who are unable to attend.

All Members are given the opportunity to access appropriate LGA Leadership Academy programmes; as well as being given individual support according to their needs. The case study presented for one Councillor demonstrates very clearly how his learning needs were identified regarding his Scrutiny role and suitable development opportunities were provided.

Increasingly, learning and development takes place in partnership with other appropriate bodies, for example, Town and Parish Councils; NHS colleagues on Health and Well-Being Boards; and Volunteer Groups.

## **Evidence from Interviews and Storyboards**

The MDO explained how the MDWP is delegated to agree the annual programme of Member briefings and events. Their recommendations then go to Cabinet and Senior Management Team for approval. Ultimately, the Council agrees Learning and Development priorities.

The MDWP had provided a Storyboard outlining their history and development over the fourteen years they have existed. This was a great insight into their changing role, and how much impact they currently have.

Members reported that they can have a one-to-one briefing on any development opportunity they miss.

One Councillor's Storyboard followed his learning and development journey from Induction through to a number of development opportunities over the last four years, including the Local Government Association's Leadership Academy. This has given him the confidence to become a learning Member Champion, to be a Member of the MDWP, and to take on the role of Area Council Chair.

Another described how taking on a Scrutiny Chair role was handled. Using the role descriptors to identify needs; taking into account previous experience; and offering appropriate L&D. A number of senior managers were involved in the learning process. The whole Committee was also offered specific training when a need arose relating to partner organisations and the MDO and Scrutiny Officer has identified a need for one-to-one development for particular roles.

### **3. LEARNING DEVELOPMENT IS EFFECTIVE IN BUILDING CAPACITY**

#### **Evidence from Portfolio and Intranet**

An evaluation Strategy is in place. Feedback is taken via the MDWP and from Members after any development opportunity. The latest annual evaluation report also used a 360 degree tool to gather feedback on impact from a number of sources, i.e. partner organisations.

The Induction Programme is reviewed every time it is used and changes made according to identified needs, for example, when it starts. The MDO now goes to the Count to begin induction the minute a Councillor is elected. There is also a Mentoring system, though this was a little patchy in its effectiveness.

Knowledge is shared through “Talkabouts”, which are open to all Members (up to fifty attend) and also to Partner organisations. These are Member-led, but well supported by Officers.

#### **Evidence from Interviews and Storyboards**

Every Member and officer interviewed mentioned the “Talkabouts”. These have obviously been a great success in involving Members and officers together in key discussions and decision-making.

There has been other beneficial joint training with officers too, such as the Licensing Training outlined in one of the Storyboards.

Area Councils have been evaluated using a Social Return on Investment model. A Storyboard shows how this worked in practice. The Storyboard explains what need was identified, what L&D was undertaken and what the outcome was for that Area Council. It led to a change in how Area Council and Ward Alliance funding is spent.

Induction has improved over the last few years. The Members were pleased to say that Induction begins at the Count. They felt valued by being given information and support right from the very moment they were elected.

Almost everyone also mentioned IT training and how much it has improved in the last few years. Barnsley is moving towards being paperless and has invested a large amount of money and L&D effort to make use of IT effectively and to make efficiencies. The majority of Members use tablets; access the Intranet; and use their mobiles.

## **Continuous Improvement**

### **Background:**

Although the purpose of the visit was to assess the submission for the Charter Plus, it was also an ideal opportunity to discuss what improvements the Authority would hope to make within the next two or three years. Each interviewee was asked for their ideas. The following were suggested:

### **Views from Interviewees:**

- Maintain the level of support and budget for Member L&D
- Continue to have a robust Member Development Working Party
- Keep working on the cultural shift in being more community-facing
- Further work is needed on Health & Social Care knowledge and skills and joint-working
- Develop skills to become even bolder in decision-making
- Encourage younger Councillors to step up to leadership roles
- To work on the Mentoring and Coaching offer, particularly for new Members

### **Views from Verifiers:**

We were very pleased to see that recommendations made by the Verifiers last time had been acted on, e.g. Joint Officer/Member development opportunities; investment in IT skills to use it more effectively; and demonstrating a more outcome-focused approach.

Barnsley MBC certainly does have ambitions, both for the organisation and for its Elected Members. In order for these to be realised, the Verifiers felt that the current level of support for L&D is excellent and needs to be maintained, if at all possible in the current climate.

Barnsley MBC should continue sharing best practice. It's good to see that 15 other councils have visited to find out how they have been so successful with their Area Councils and the L&D underpinning that.

## **Verifiers' Suggestions**

Whilst the Verifiers acknowledge that the Officer and Members' Leadership Programmes need to be different in several key ways, we would hope that you consider joint elements on future programmes.

PDRs - for MDWP and MDO to continue work on how it's done and by whom; for example, having a buddy to talk through the L&D needs section.

And, to encourage everyone to use the excellent Intranet facility.

### **Recommendation from the Verification Team**

Having reviewed all the evidence, it is the Assessors' view that Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council has met the standards set down in the North East Charter Plus for Member Development and has a genuine culture of learning and development amongst its elected Members that is showing real outcomes. Congratulations!

Signed:



**Councillor Malcolm Brain, Gateshead Council and LGA Member Peer**

Signed:



**Jill Rouse, Associate, North East Regional Employers' Organisation**

Signed:



**Michael Brodie, Director and Quality Monitoring Officer, North East Regional Employers' Organisation**